



Connecticut Department of
**ENERGY &
ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION**

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

Public Hearing - February 22, 2012
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Daniel Esty
Presented By Deputy Commissioner Susan Frechette

Raised Senate Bill 85 - An Act Concerning Campground Reservations at Certain State Parks

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding Raised Senate Bill 85 - An Act Concerning Campground Reservations at Certain State Parks. The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) welcomes the opportunity to offer the following testimony.

We appreciate the Committee's willingness to raise this bill at the request of DEEP. This proposal, which we strongly support, would make reasonable changes to the statute that controls the number of days that a camping party may reserve sites at Hammonasset Beach and Rocky Neck State Parks.

This proposal would change the application of the "21 limit" on camping stays at the state's two shoreline state parks from a seasonal limit, to a limit that applies just during the period from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Additionally, the bill would allow DEEP to rent a camping space to anyone (regardless of the 21 limit) on a "walk-in" basis whenever there are vacancies throughout the camping season. The proposal also allows for subsequent adjustments to this limitation to be promulgated as agency regulations, as opposed to requiring additional legislative action. This change will provide an accommodation to those campers who wish to camp in the spring and fall, while continuing to maintain a reasonable limit on camping stays during the prime camping season, in order to allow the maximum number of campers to enjoy these parks.

As background, legislation was passed in 1969 to limit camping stays to 21 days in the aggregate at these two State Parks. This was done after many years of legislative discussion to end the prior practice of camping parties staying at those parks for the entire season. During that era, the camping season only ran from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Since that time, the camping season at these two parks has lengthened into the spring and fall. This proposal recognizes that fact by continuing the 21 limitation during the prime camping season, but allowing additional stays during the "shoulder seasons".

Over the years, DEEP's on-line camping reservation system has not accurately implemented this limitation, allowing campers to make reservations for multiple periods of up to 21 days, as long as there is a break of at least 5 days in between reservations. Once we became aware of the inconsistency between the law and our reservation system practice, we discontinued accepting reservations that exceed 21 days. Some members of the camping public rightly point out that campsite vacancies in the spring and fall season would occur if parties were limited to 21 days throughout the year. To address that concern, this proposal would limit the applicability of the 21 day maximum to just the prime camping season, and allow people to make additional reservations for the spring and fall, and when the parks are not at capacity, and would also allow a camping party to stay on a "walk-in" basis whenever there are vacancies throughout the camping season.

We believe that this proposal achieves a balance between the competing goals of allowing folks to have a lengthy camping vacation at these parks, and the goal of allowing the greatest number of families to enjoy that same benefit. We also believe that increased revenue to the General Fund would result from additional camping stays that would be permitted with this change in law.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. If you should require any additional information, please contact DEEP's legislative liaison, Robert LaFrance at 424-3401 or Robert.LaFrance@ct.gov